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AUTHOR Sloan, Charles A.; Triplett, DeWayne
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ABSTRACT

A study generated from a national sampling of parents and teachers sought to answer the following questions: (1) Are parents' and teachers' perceptions of handwriting alike or different? (2) Have parents' opinions about cursive and manuscript writing changed over the past ten years? and (3) What are current concerns regarding handwriting instruction? The parents and teachers responded to more than forty open-ended and multiple choice items that covered various facets of manuscript and cursive handwriting. Their answers were then compared to the responses of parents and teachers from a 1966 study. It was found that parents and teachers perceive handwriting in much the same way, and that parents' opinions about handwriting have not changed much in the past ten years. The current concerns regarding handwriting instruction are: handwriting needs to be emphasized as an important elementary school subject, handwriting is best taught as a separate subject, typing is not a substitute for writing, special consideration should be given to students who have difficulty establishing handedness, children should be taught both manuscript and cursive writing, and better home-school communication is needed with respect to the handwriting program. (Tables of findings are included.) (JF)

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PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HANDWRITING

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by

Dr. Charles A. Sloan
Professor of Education
Chairman, Department of Curriculum & Instruction
Northern Illinois University

and

Dr. DeWayne Triplett
Professor of Education
Northern Illinois University

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PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HANDWRITING

Over the years parents and teachers have debated the relative merits of various methods, materials, and philosophical positions regarding handwriting instruction. This healthy interchange has caused researchers, curriculum specialists, and publishers to reexamine instructional emphases in handwriting. One result, for example, is that rote drill in "push-pulls" and "ovals" is no longer a highly regarded method in teaching children to form letters. Today, the focus is on helping writers produce legible, individualistic letter forms in words that express meaning. With this broad objective in mind, the research reported herein was encouraged by a grant[1] to further investigate parents' and teachers' perceptions of handwriting. More specifically, the writers sought to answer the following questions:

(1) Are parents' and teachers' perceptions of handwriting alike or different?

(2) Have parents' opinions about cursive and manuscript writing changed over the last ten years?

(3) What are current concerns regarding handwriting instruction?

Information for the present study was generated from a national sampling of parents and teachers. Responses were received from 905 parents and 785 teachers from all regions of the Continental United States. The teachers and parents responded to over forty open-ended and multiple choice items that covered various facets of manuscript and cursive handwriting.

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Is good handwriting a positive indication of a person's feeling about himself? A majority of parents (56.3%) and teachers (69%) responded affirmatively to the question, "Does good handwriting enhance self-image?" Furthermore, an encouraging number of these persons expressed a desire to increase their handwriting proficiencies. These findings may be interrelated, however, as the respondents indicated there is a paucity of emphasis toward increasing handwriting skills in both higher education and industry. Only 22 percent of the teachers reported receiving formal training in the teaching of handwriting, and 66 percent of all those responding said they would take further instruction in handwriting if it were offered in their district. A similarly felt need for improved handwriting skills was indicated by 37.4 percent of the parents. Furthermore, the majority of parents (62.5) and teachers (56.5) report their handwriting to be satisfactory. A comparison of how parents and teachers responded on other issues regarding handwriting are summarized in Table 1. A discussion of the information contained in Table 1 is discussed in this section.

The preceding indications of inadequacy in handwriting, as well as observations and involvement in handwriting instruction, may have influenced 54.5 percent of the parents and 76.3 percent of the teachers who stated there was not enough emphasis on handwriting in the schools today. Moreover, 88.2 percent of the teachers and 31.6 percent of the parents felt handwriting was not emphasized as much as in the past.

Two other areas of strong agreement among parents and teachers existed. The vast majority of parents (94.6%) and teachers (96.3%) agreed that both

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manuscript and cursive writing should be taught to all children. In contrast, a low percent of teachers (8%) and parents (21.3%) felt that typing is an alternative to handwriting.

Most parents (93.3%) and teachers (91.0%) are right-handed writers. Information found in this study (published elsewhere)[2] indicated that about twice as many children are left-handed as compared to the left-handed adults. Further analysis found that 6.2 percent of the parents reported being left-handed, but these persons also stated that 10.2 percent of their offspring are left-handed. The analysis also found that left-handed parents reported that 23.7 percent of their children were left-handed. These data suggest that the number of left-handed persons has doubled in one generation. Another finding was that 11.6 percent of the parents and 24.4 percent of the teachers reported children that had difficulty in establishing handedness. The latter finding suggests that the schools have instructional challenges that need close attention in the area of handwriting.

Two perceptions held only by parents are important and worthy of note. A low percentage (22.4%) of parents indicated that they were well-informed about the handwriting program in their local school. Further, approximately one-third of the parents report spending time working with children at home on handwriting skills. Approximately the same number of persons agreed that parents should help teach similar skills at home. It is apparent that the majority of parents expect the school to teach handwriting and other basic subjects in school. The above fact was well established when parents were asked to rank order the twelve usual subjects in elementary school. The

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parents ranked handwriting fifth in importance among twelve subjects listed in Table 2.

One final perception held only by teachers should be mentioned, namely that a large majority of teachers (70.5%) felt that handwriting should be taught as a separate subject. At the same time, a low percentage of teachers (21.2%) felt that handwriting is emphasized in other subjects.

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TABLE 1
Summary of Selected Questions and Responses of
Parents' and Teachers' Attitudes Toward Handwriting

	Response Item(s)	Percent of Responses by Parents	Teachers
1.	Handwriting Enhances Self-Image	56.3	69.0
2.	Would Like Further Training in Handwriting	37.4	66.0
3.	Received Formal Handwriting Instruction in School	88.7	73.6
4.	My Personal Handwriting is Average/Satisfactory or Better	89.6 (67.5)	89.9 (56.5)
5.	There is Enough Emphasis on Handwriting in Schools	45.5	23.7
6.	Children Like Handwriting	82.6	85.6
7.	Both Manuscript and Cursive Writing Should be Emphasized	94.6	96.3
8.	Typing as an Alternative to Handwriting	21.3	8.0
9.	Handedness of Respondents		
	Right Handed	93.3	91.0
	Left Handed	6.2	7.4
	Ambidextrous	.5	1.6
10.	Children had Difficulty in Establishing Handedness	11.6	24.4

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TABLE 2
Ranking of Twelve Elementary School Subjects
by 905 Parents

Ranking	$\bar{x}$ Score[1]	School Subject
1	1.71	Reading
2	3.33	Math
3	4.14	Spelling
4	4.72	Oral and Written Communication
5	5.98	Handwriting
6	6.26	Science
7	6.70	Social Studies
8	7.11	Literature
9	8.61	Health/Safety
10	8.97	Physical Education
11	9.62	Music
12	10.13	Art

[1] The parents were directed to rank the subjects from 1 to 12, with number 1 as the most important school subject.

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A TEN YEAR COMPARISON OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HANDWRITING

In addition to seeking general information about parents' perception of handwriting, the writers were interested in knowing if certain attitudes had changed with time. A study by Renaud and Groff[3] in 1966 assessed the opinions of parents toward handwriting. The study reported herein focuses on many of these same questions and reports information about parent perceptions over the period of time from 1966 to 1976. Table 3 contains a summary of questions and responses of these two studies conducted ten years apart. A discussion of the differences and likenesses are found in the paragraphs that follow.

Most parents in both groups believe that manuscript writing should be taught in grades one and two. However, fewer parents in 1976 objected to manuscript writing being emphasized throughout the elementary school years. Furthermore, the number of parents in the 1976 group reported greater enjoyment of manuscript writing. There seemed to be only slight changes in their opinions with regard to (1) the number of children who wish to continue manuscript writing after learning cursive writing and (2) that children write in manuscript as rapidly as cursive.

There were two surprisingly identical opinions in that both groups agreed that manuscript writing is easier to read than cursive writing and that handwriting is more important than ten years ago. The latter was further supported as both groups believed that more handwriting skills are needed today. This was supported as high percentages in both groups only rated their own handwriting as satisfactory. The percentage of persons rating their own handwriting as above-average were (19.2) and excellent (3.2).

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TABLE 3
A Comparison of Questions Asked of Parents Regarding Their Perceptions of Handwriting over a Ten Year Span of Time

Response Items	Renaud & Groff 1966[1] Percent of Agreement	Sloan & Triplett 1976[2] Percent of Agreement
Approve of Manuscript in Grades 1 and 2	89.0%	92.0%
Object to Manuscript through Grade 6	81.1	52.8
Manuscript Enjoyed by Children	50.6	72.0
Children Wished to Continue Manuscript when Changed to Cursive	14.6	19.1
Children Write Manuscript as Rapidly as Cursive	19.8	36.0
Manuscript is Easier to Read than Cursive	63.1	63.0
Handwriting is More Important than 30 years ago	31.6	31.6
Satisfied with Own Handwriting Style	71.0	89.9
Believe More Handwriting Skills are Needed	85.7	74.5

[1]This study includes responses of 328 parents from a single California community.

[2]This study includes responses of 905 parents from a national sample from all regions of the USA.

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CURRENT CONCERNS REGARDING HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION

A number of suggestions for educators to consider are posited below as a result of the research reported herein by the writers and from reviewing the research and writings of others, they are as follows:

1. Effective handwriting remains as an important skill for children as perceived by parents and teachers. Most parents and teachers agree that handwriting needs to be emphasized as an important elementary school subject.
2. Most teachers believe handwriting is best taught as a separate subject.
3. Even though we are living in a technological era, neither parents or teachers believe that typing is a substitute for effective handwriting.
4. It appears that left handedness is increasing. Special consideration should be given to these students in their handwriting development as many parents and teachers report difficulties in establishing handedness.
5. The vast majority of parents believe that children should be taught both manuscript and cursive writing. Furthermore, parents and teachers strongly indicate that children enjoy handwriting.
6. Parents are not well informed about the handwriting program in schools. Moreover, they believe that the school should teach these basic skills. Better home-school communications is obviously needed with respect to the handwriting program.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

1. Research funds were given to this project by the A.N. Palmer Handwriting Company. A National sampling of parents and teachers was conducted during the 1975-76 academic year.

2. Renaud, Albert J. and Patrick J. Groff. "Parents' Opinion about Handwriting Styles," Elementary English, 43:873-76, December, 1966, pp. 873-76.

3. Triplett, DeWayne and Charles A. Sloan. "New Perceptions of Left-Handed Writers," Catholic Teacher, April, 1977.

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